



Gaslight News

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October 2021

Historical Society of Riverton

rivertonhistory.com

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Founded 1970

Riverton, NJ 08077

Incorporated 1978

THE QUESTERS



This marks the first time that all three organizations have come together.



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HSR partners with Porch Club to host "History of Riverton" for M'town Questers



ALL PHOTOS: Susan Dechnik

On Tuesday, Oct. 12, Historical Society Board Member and Town Historian **Roger Prichard** presented "The History of Riverton," at the Porch Club to about fifty persons, including members of the Moorestown Indian Springs Questers, HSR Board members, and Porch Club members.

After a year-long hiatus caused by COVID, it was the first outing in some time for the

Questers, a non-profit 501(c) organization dedicated to historic preservation.

With historic documents, maps, photos, and illustrations, some of which had not been publicly displayed, Roger Prichard's engaging and lively discourse took his audience on a fact-filled tour through Riverton's history.

Starting with the Founders and their abolitionist leanings, and how they chose architect Samuel Sloan to design their new village, Roger gave the group a crash-course in the fundamentals of Riverton history.

Roger further



Town Historian Roger Prichard

See **QUESTERS** on 5

William C. Probsting 1943-2021

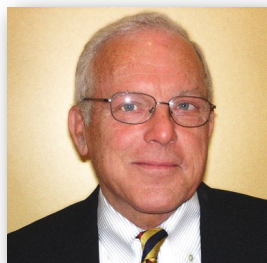
The life-long Riverton resident, Quaker, Westfield Friends Headmaster for nearly four decades, community leader, and HSR Board Member passed away at his home on Sept. 20, 2021.

William C. Probsting, 77, a valued member of the HSR Board, passed away at his home in Riverton on Monday, September 20, 2021.

A life-long resident of Riverton, Bill Probsting lived in the house on Howard Street that has been in his family for three generations. Bill was headmaster of Westfield Friends School from 1974 to 2013.

After his retirement, Bill continued to serve his community through membership on the board of the Riverton Historical Society and through involvement with other non-profit organizations in the area.

We will miss him.



His family plans a memorial celebration of life to honor Bill's life at a gathering during the July 4th holiday, 2022.

Donations in his honor can be made to the [Riverton Historical Society](#) and to [Westfield Friends School](#) for the William Probsting

Scholarship Fund that has been established there.

Those wishing to offer condolences and share memories of William C. Probsting may do so at Westfield Friends School's [Face-book page](#) or on the Weber Funeral Home's [Obituary page](#).

- PAT BRUNKER



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THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

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Post Office Box # 112
Riverton, NJ 08077

E-mail/Web:
rivertonhistory@gmail.com
rivertonhistory.com/



Ready for your perusal.

Our Sub-Committee on Sub-Surface Issues adds another historical marker at 308 Main

On October 21, 2021, HSR's intrepid Sub-Committee on Sub-Surface Issues sank a hole for another in our series of markers, at the home of **Jan and Dennis DeVries** and **Morgan and Andy Leone** at 308 Main.

Joseph Campbell, the founder of the Campbell Soup Co., purchased this magnificent home for his family in 1872 when he was 55 years old and had become quite successful in his business of preserving fruits and vegetables – and making soup.

The family lived there for



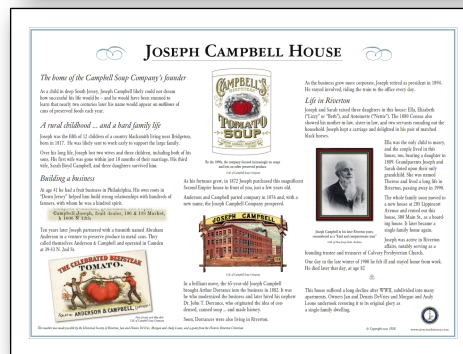
Homeowners Jan and Dennis DeVries admire their new lawn ornament. PHOTO: Roger Prichard

almost 20 years, before building a new home at 205 Lippincott, where they all lived for the rest of their lives.

The marker was designed and written by **Roger Prichard** and is the 8th in the series of this design installed so far.

The DeVries and Leone families have done a magnificent job of bringing the Campbell House back from a very sorry state. Joseph Campbell was a man of high standards and we think he would be proud of them!

- ROGER PRICHARD



JOSEPH CAMPBELL HOUSE

The home of the Campbell Soup Company's founder

As the nation grew more prosperous, Joseph moved to Philadelphia in 1872. He found a vacant lot on the corner of Main and 10th Streets, and he built the Campbell House.

Joseph was the first of a family of seven children. His wife, Mary, was born in 1838. They were married in 1860. Joseph was 55 years old when he moved to Philadelphia.

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A digital scan renders a time-damaged and inaccessible map a valuable research tool



33" X 53"

The 1886 Hunter and Richards Map of Palmyra and Riverton hanging in Borough Hall measures 33" X 53".

The section of the map shown at right corresponds to the portion of the map above within the red square and only hints at the detail that can be seen in the full-size scan.

Published 35 years after the founding of Riverton, it shows the development, still undergoing, that transformed a summer refuge for wealthy Philadelphians into a thriving year-round village.

Note the locations and names of tradesmen and merchants, Dreer's Nursery, churches and schools, a post office, the home of George Senat that later became the library, the Lyceum, and Riverton Ball Grounds that gave way to a quarter-mile bicycle track, which in turn, yielded to housing development.

Click here to see a larger [8.57MB view](#) on our website.

An unusual map of Riverton has been hanging in plain sight for many years but is often unremarked. If you have ever attended a meeting in Borough Hall you may have noticed a large, framed object on the right side wall next to where Council is seated.

The 1886 "Hunter and Richards Map of Palmyra and Riverton," is a large property map that shows the layout of building lots (with owners' names) of both towns. Only one other copy is known to exist, and each was clearly printed on inferior paper because they have not held up well. The Borough copy is in delicate condition and quite discolored and the other one is even more fragile.

It has not been easy to use for research but when we realized that [The Athenaeum of Philadelphia](#) has a very large scanning table, can scan a framed object through glass, and does affordable

work for non-profits, we knew we had a good project on our hands.

Mayor Suzanne Cairns Wells didn't hesitate a second before giving us permission to transport this fragile (and unwieldy!) object to Center City, and a generous donor offered to cover 100% of the costs.

Pat Solin and **Roger Prichard** carefully drove it to the Athenaeum's Regional Digital Imaging Center, anxiously avoiding every pothole.

They got to watch the amazing machine produce a better-than-life digital recreation of the 33" x 53" image at 400 pixels to the inch, resulting in a big (big!) digital file.

All home again in the same day, the map is back up on the wall and its digital clone is in the Borough's hands as well as into HSR's growing digital archive collection.

- ROGER PRICHARD



HSR's Archives: What's Old is Now New Again

nanos gigantium humeris insidentes – Bernard of Chartres, 12th Century – Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

You never know what treasures you can find in closets and file cabinets. As noted in an [earlier HSR post](#), the Society is saving Riverton treasures with an ambitious cataloging project designed to document and save our Riverton history and make it accessible online to researchers as well as to our town residents.



archival
storage
boxes

The Archives Committee of the HSR is tackling a massive job – taking the previous HSR Archives files and integrating newly-found Riverton documents and artifacts into stable, archival boxes and creating coherent Finding Aids that will be published online once each phase of the project is completed.

This professionally-guided team effort began prior to the COVID outbreak by the HSR Archives Committee Chairpersons **Keith Betten**, **Iris Gaughan**, and **Pat Bruncker**.

Keith, a retired archivist who worked for the New Jersey State Archives, provided the logical and detailed cataloging structure of our new HSR Archives and ensures that the other cataloging volunteers can follow his lead.

Iris, also a former librarian, is instrumental in multiple aspects of the project including cataloging parts of the collection and soliciting cataloging volunteers.

Pat Bruncker and **Robin Brown** have worked organizing the Society's large collection of historical artifacts by cataloging and storing the items in archival paper and boxes.

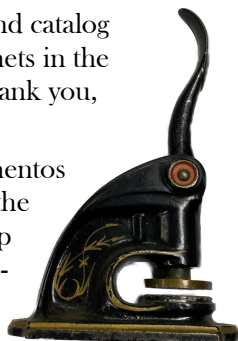


artifact
storage
boxes

My involvement includes organizing and cataloging the Riverton Organizations archive, namely the sections on Riverton Free Library, Riverton Free Library Association, and Friends of the Riverton Free Library.

As a former member of the Association board and former librarian, I can identify materials and documents within the old HSR Archives as well as sort and catalog the wealth of materials stored in file cabinets in the old section of the library's basement. Thank you, Iris, for your great start on the project!

So many interesting documents and mementos were stored in the old basement. This is the elegant original embossing property stamp from 1906, that was in use before the rubber library property stamp and ink pad.



Riverton had its own author who penned a series of books on life in Riverton – **Mary Biddle Fidler**'s Reddy books. We now have a full collection of all four of her books for children.

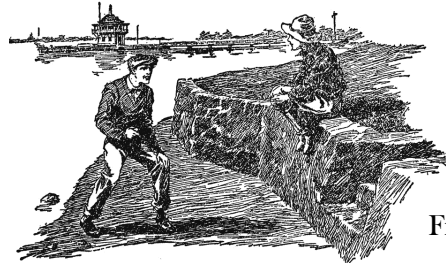


Illustration from *Anna Mary, A Girl of the Nineties* by Mary Biddle Fidler



Reddy, 1929

(See more about author Mary Biddle Fidler in [GN #130, Jan 2008](#).)

Decades of cataloged material accession books show what people were interested in reading at the start of our little library. Treasurers' Reports and President of the Board of Trustees Annual Reports going back to the founding of the library in 1899 record how they spent money then.

Fundraisers by the Friends of the Riverton Free Library continue to be essential support, especially as the Association is a unique hybrid, both an independent library as well as a branch of the Burlington County Library System. We have sets of booklets from the many RFL Friends Candlelight House Tours – once called the Christmas House Tour which was originally a spring event!



Now sorted and cataloged are photos of the interior and exterior of the library from over the years, samples of summer reading programs, and old newspaper articles about library programs and staff.



Of course, we can document many of the library's multiple renovations, including its major expansion in 1991.

Beautifully written cursive Minute Books of the Board of Trustees record business affairs from the turn of the last century.

Today, we see further by appreciating the innovations and hard work of the library founders, and past and present library staff and volunteers of the library. We are indebted to them.

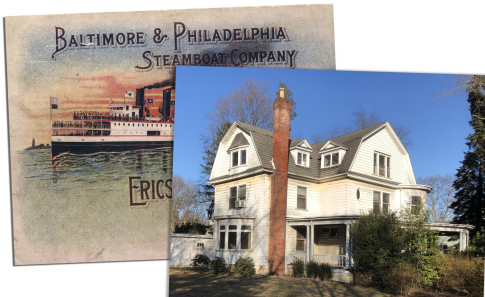
PLACE AND PUBLISHER	DATE	PAGES
Appleton	1892	229
Harper	1892	411
Boughton	1892	316
Macmillan	1897	361
St. P.		147
East	1891	324

- PATRICIA SMITH SOLIN



Fate of historic Groves Mansion undetermined

The Architectural Review Committee deems changes “a loss to the historic fabric of the Borough and the neighborhood.”



Currently, this grand 1901 mansion of a steamboat company president stands empty and we know of no plans for it or its expansive grounds.

JRB Property Group, LLC, a company of **James Brandenburger**, appeared before the Planning Board in June, requesting a single zoning variance to permit them to subdivide off the two side yards of the property to insert two new houses there.

The professionals on the Planning Board subsequently determined that the proposal would require not one but four variances, one of which would put a new property line about eight feet (8') from the round porch of the big, historic house.

Mr. Brandenburger testified at their first and only hearing that the mansion is restorable and that he had a buyer for that portion of the property.

Because it is an important contributing resource to Riverton's National Register Historic District, considerable

interest was generated and a number of protections for the whole property exist.

The Planning Board expressed a number of concerns and directed JRB to meet with the Borough's Architectural Review Committee to get their reaction. They met in mid-July.

The ARC issued a solid letter, which read, in part, “The mansion was designed to occupy the entire two hundred twenty-five (225) foot frontage. Changes to that are a loss to the mansion, the historic fabric of the Borough and the neighborhood.”

JRB requested delays in July, and then in August, during which time the need for additional variances was revealed. A few hours before their scheduled September hearing, JRB notified the Planning Board that they were withdrawing their application completely.

That is all we know for now. We are very concerned that this historic home continues to sit there with vines growing up it, obviously unoccupied. See more in our [Apr 13 web post](#), in [GN#187, Aug 2021](#) and in an [Apr 20 web post](#).

- ROGER PRICHARD



Arcadia book is on track for July 4, 2022 release

The Arcadia Images of America book project mentioned in our [September 11 web post](#) is well underway. We will still accept high quality scans or images that we will scan for you and return.

Heavily illustrated with captioned vintage postcards, photos, and maps from our archives and from private collections, the 128 page paperback will animate the cherished memories of people, places, and events that make our town so unique. Here is just a taste.

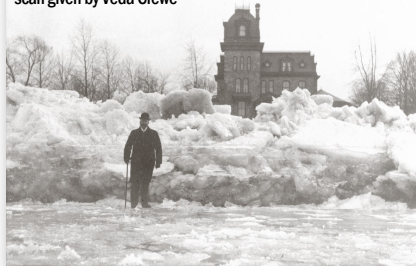
The Society is thrilled to be able to finally put this into the hands of Rivertonians as a special way to enjoy our shared history. We anticipate our first publication to be available on July 4, 2022 and there will be a very limited quantity of books available on that day. More on how to obtain your own copy to follow.

The proceeds of these books will be used to benefit the HSR in its efforts to preserve and explore our rich history and make it accessible to all who find local legend and lore as exciting as we do.

- FAITH ENDICOTT



Charles Miller Biddle, 207 Bank Ave.
scan given by Veda Crewe



Thank you Membership and Donations Report

October 28, 2021

The Society welcomes new members **Colleen and Mike Pattanite** of Riverton! Thank you to everyone who has renewed for 2021.

If you haven't yet, please take a moment to send your dues payment via check to:

Historical Society of Riverton
PO Box 112
Riverton, NJ 08077

Or, visit our [website](#) and use the PayPal DONATE button.

We extend condolences to those friends and family of our colleague **Bill Probsting** and we humbly express our gratitude to those who have contributed to the Historical Society of Riverton in his memory.

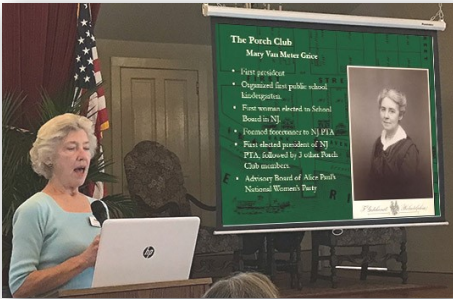
As of today, Bill's friends have donated nearly \$1000 in his name. We sincerely thank **Elizabeth Martino** of New Fairfield, CT, **Anne O'Toole Salinas** of Washington, DC, **Ed and Terri Gallagher** of Palmyra, **John and Bette Califf** of Mount Laurel, and **Amy Lou Waters** of Sanibel, FL for their generosity! Certainly, the good man who enriched the lives of many persons whom he touched over the years was quite beloved.

- HEATHER MACINTOSH HUFFNAGLE



QUESTERS from 1

outlined how the steamboat company, the Yacht Club, the railroad, houses of worship, businesses, Riverton Free Library, and Riverton School each played roles in Riverton's development.



Pat Brunker recalled how, since its inception in 1890, the Porch Club has adopted a mission of service as a center for social, civic, and cultural enrichment.

After a delicious lunch, the Questers used brochures previously prepared by the HSR to take a self-guided tour of the *actual* Riverton.

Iris Gaughan, who is a member of the Porch Club as well as

Porch Club Historian **Pat Brunker** examined the club's origin and focused on members who played a part in the suffrage movement.

A lively and enthusiastic question and answer discussion followed.

the HSR, declared the program "astounding in both content and presentation" and "an excellent glimpse of the town's founders and the unique idea of a planned community."

In a gracious thank-you note later received by organizer

Phyllis Rodgers, one Quester thought the Porch Club "an amazing treasure" and complimented Roger for "a seamless delivery of Riverton's jaw-dropping history."



Roger Prichard will reprise the program in an expanded version at the Porch Club on February 16, 2022, that will be open to the community.

- SUSAN DECHNIK



HSR President Bill Brown and event organizer Phyllis Rodgers

Oct. 1976 - The Historical Society that almost wasn't

Dissolved, then restored two weeks later, a renewed organization started the house plaque project that is still ongoing today

There has been a recent flurry of interest among homeowners to apply for a historic plaque for their home. But how and when did the first house plaques get started?

In December 1974, the [very first](#) Historical Society of Riverton newsletter mentioned plans to present plaques to the oldest homes in Riverton to coincide with the 1976 Bicentennial. In March 1976, [GN#5](#) announced that **Matt Kenney**, a Boy Scout working on his Eagle rank, and other Troop #50 scouts would be making the first plaques.

HSR President **Marilyn Colozzi** recorded in [GN#7](#) that the Society awarded the first of several plaques on November 9, 1976, at a meeting in the Porch Club. She especially thanked **Lenore Probsting, Betty Lockhart, Toby Hunn, Ruth Schmierer, Emily Christ, and Ginny Kline** for their help on the plaque project.

Only a month before, at a special meeting of the HSR Board on October 5, **the group had decided to dissolve the Society**, but they met again on October 20 and resolved to continue.

Egads! This is the Historical Society that almost wasn't.

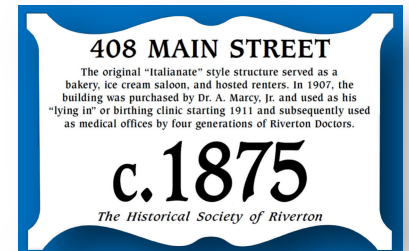
Lucky for us, the group persevered and it placed many plaques on homes over the years.

Flash forward to 2015, at the Dan Campbell Preservation Awards Night, when **Bill McDermott** unveiled an updated historical house plaque the HSR started to offer to new applicants.



This new construction better holds up to the elements than the former one and the digitally imprinted caption mimics the classic appearance of hand-applied painted lettering of the originals.

At a recent Board meeting, House Plaque Chairperson **Bill McDermott** complimented **Pat Solin** on the painstaking research on 408 Main Street that she did for her neighbors, **Elizabeth and Thomas Rafter**, in preparation for getting a plaque.



Bill explained that the term "lying in" refers to women who were in need of a 'mid-wife' who then helped healthy women during labor, delivery, and after the birth of their babies.

He went on to explain his family's connection to the property. **Rachel Reiger, Mary McDermott's** mother, and her sister, **Florence Jordon**, served as midwives there.

In another coincidence, **Bill & Mary McDermott** rented 408 Main St. in the 1920's with their three sons - **Bill, Paul, and Carl**, before moving to Cinnaminson & 8th Street - the base of "Irish Row." Read more about Riverton's Irish Row in the [March 2010 GN#139](#).

For more information on guidelines and how to get a historic house plaque, see our [Research Your House page](#).

- BILL McDERMOTT & JOHN McCORMICK

